In a case of this kind, that city fasts and cries out⁰ by blowing the shofar, and all of its surrounding areasⁱ join them in their fast, but they do not cry out. Rabbi Akiva disagrees and says: They cry out but they do not fast. The mishna continues: And likewise, if a city is afflicted by pestilence or collapsing buildings,⁲ that city fasts and cries out, and all of its surrounding areas fast but they do not cry out. Rabbi Akiva says: They cry out but they do not fast.

The mishna inquires: What is considered a plague of pestilence? When is a series of deaths treated as a plague? The mishna answers: If a city that sends out five hundred infantrymen, i.e., it has a population of five hundred able-bodied men, and three days are taken out of it in three consecutive days, this is a plague of pestilence, which requires fasting and crying out. If the death rate is lower than that, this is not pestilence.

For the following calamities they cry out in every place:⁴ For blight; for mildew; for locusts; for caterpillars, a type of locust that comes in large swarms and descends upon a certain place; for dangerous beasts that have entered a town; and for the sword, i.e., legions of an invading army. The reason that they cry out about these misfortunes in every place is because these are calamities that spread.

An incident occurred in which Elders descended from Jerusalem to their cities throughout Eretz Yisrael and decreed a fast throughout the land because there was seen in the city of Ashkelon a small amount of blight,⁶ enough to fill the mouth of an oven. This fast was observed throughout Eretz Yisrael, as blight spreads quickly. And furthermore, they decreed a fast because wolves had eaten two children in Transjordan. Rabbi Yosei says: This fast was decreed not because they ate the children, but because these wolves were merely seen in an inhabited area.

For the following calamities they cry out⁵ even on Shabbat:⁶⁷ For a city that is surrounded by gentle troops, or for a place in danger of being flooded by a river that has swollen its banks, or for a ship tossed about at sea. Rabbi Yosei said: One may cry out on Shabbat to summon help, but it may not be sounded for crying out to God. Shimon the Tinnite says: One may cry out on Shabbat even for pestilence, but the Rabbis did not agree with him.

It explains that people living in the outlying areas must also fast, as they are indirectly affected by the lack of rain in the neighboring city. If there is no rainfall in the city, its residents will go to purchase food in the outlying areas, causing food shortages and higher prices.

Other commentators suggest that the residents of surrounding areas must participate in the distress affecting their neighbors in the city and offer prayers on their behalf (Rabbenu Yehonatan).

In the Jerusalem Talmud, the dispute between the anonymous first tanna of the mishna and Rabbi Akiva is explained as follows: The first tanna of the mishna derives the regulations that apply to those living outside the stricken city from the halakhot of Yom Kippur, on which fasting is required but the shofar is not sounded. Conversely, Rabbi Akiva derives these regulations from the halakhot of Rashi HaShana, on which the shofar is sounded but a fast is not observed.

That city fasts and cries out – possibly because it mentions only the more common situations. They cite several talmudic sources that refer to other calamities for which they cry out even on Shabbat (Gevurah Ari).

For the following they cry out even on Shabbat – Even in Chapter One (14a), the Gemara argued that the mishna cannot mean that the shofar is sounded on Shabbat over these calamities, as blowing a shofar is prohibited on Shabbat. Rather, the first tanna of the mishna permits the recitation of the Anenu prayer, recited on fasts, even on Shabbat. Rabbi Yosei disagrees, claiming that although people may cry out for help in times of danger, they may not submit a formal prayer over their distress, as there is no assurance that their prayers will be effective (see Rashi).

Many early authorities maintain that the term cry out usually means that the shofar is sounded as part of the observance of a fast. Yet even they agree that in this instance it does not imply the proclamation of a fast, as a fast may not be declared on Shabbat. However, according to one reading of the Ramban, a fast must be proclaimed even on Shabbat if the community is threatened with one of the calamities listed in the mishna (Rambam Sefer Zemanim, Hilchot Taanit 16).
The mishna adds: In general, they cry out on account of any trouble that should not befall the community, a euphemism for trouble that may befall the community, except for an overabundance of rain. 4 Although too much rain may be disastrous, one does not cry out over it, because rain is a sign of a blessing. The mishna relates: An incident occurred in which the people said to Honi HaMe’aggel: Pray that rain should fall. He said to them: Go out and bring in the clay ovens used to roast the Paschal lambs, so that they will not dissolve in the water, as torrential rains are certain to fall. He prayed, and no rain fell at all.

Subsequently, the rains fell in their standard manner but continued unabated, filling the city with water until all of the Jews exited the residential areas of Jerusalem and went to the Temple Mount due to the rain. They came and said to him: Just as you prayed over the rains that they should fall, so too, pray that they should stop. He said to them: Go out and see if the Claimants’ Stone, a large stone located in the city, upon which proclamations would be posted with regard to lost and found items, has been washed away. 5 In other words, if the water has not obliterated the Claimants’ Stone, it is not yet appropriate to pray for the rain to cease.

Shimon ben Shetah, 6 the Nasi of the Sanhedrin at the time, relayed to Honi HaMe’aggel: Were you not Honi, I would have decreed that you be ostracized, but what can I do to you? You nag 7 God and He does your bidding, like a son who nags his father and his father does his bidding without reprimand. After all, rain fell as you requested. About you, the verse states: “Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her who bore you rejoice” (Proverbs 23:25).

The mishna teaches another halakha with regard to fast days: If they were fasting for rain, and rain fell for them before sunrise, they need not complete their fast until the evening. However, if it fell after sunrise, they must complete their fast. Rabbi Eliezer says: If rain fell before midday, they need not complete their fast; but if it rains after midday, they must complete their fast.

**Notes**

4 Fasts are not proclaimed in Eretz Yisra’el in times of excessive rainfall, except in places where there is concern that the water might cause buildings to collapse (Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 574:1).

5 This refers to a large stone located in Jerusalem that served as the center for announcements concerning lost property (see Bava Metzia 21b). It is called the Claimants’ Stone in reference to the claims that were put forward with regard to lost objects.

6 Nag (mishatei) – אֲנִי. Many commentaries have argued that the term is derived from the root ה-ר-ע, to sin, this interpretation is difficult to accept in this context. Others maintain that it is from the Arabic حَازِي, ha’iza, which means to obtain things by imposing. If so, mishatei means to beg, implore, and indulge oneself.

**Language**

Shimon ben Shetah – The Nasi of the Sanhedrin during the reign of Alexander Yannai, Shimon ben Shetah was one of the most important Jewish leaders and exponents of the Oral Law. He was an authoritative leader who insisted on observing the minutiae of Torah law. He took vigorous action against anyone who challenged the authority of the accepted halakha, whether the challenge came from outside the Jewish community or from sectarians of all kinds within.

In his time, witchcraft was expropriated from the land by means of special decrees, and he firmly established the halakhot of testimony. He also improved and reinforced marriage contracts. Since he insisted on the overarching power of the Sanhedrin, he even summoned the king to judgment, and demanded that he respect the court like an ordinary citizen.

For this and many other reasons, he came into conflict with Alexander Yannai and was forced to go into hiding on several occasions. However, as evident from the account in Bava Kamma (48a), he did not succumb to threats, honor, or flattery. When people took revenge against him and testified falsely against his son, he and his son accepted punishment so as not to invalidate the established halakhot.

Although his sister, Salome Alexandra, was the king’s wife, Shimon ben Shetah continued to practice his profession, which was apparently tanning leather. After the death of Alexander Yannai, his widow reigned, and internal affairs were handled by Shimon ben Shetah. This was considered a time of tranquillity in every respect.
The mishna relates: An incident occurred in which the court decreed a fast in Lod due to a lack of rain, and rain fell for them before midday. Rabbi Tarfon said to the people: Go out, and eat, and drink, and treat this day as a Festival. And they went out, and ate, and drank, and treated the day as a Festival, and in the afternoon they came to the synagogue and recited the great hallel, to thank God for answering their prayers.

**GEMARA** The mishna taught: The order of these fasts is stated only when the fast concerns the first rainfall.9 And the Gemara raises a contradiction between this statement and the following baraita: If the periods of the first and second rainfall pass without rain, this is the time to ask and pray for rain; if the third passes without rain, this is the time to fast.

Rav Yehuda said: this is what the mishna is saying: When does the order of these fasts that is stated apply? When the periods of the first, second, and third rainfall have passed and rain has not fallen. However, if rain fell in the time of the first rainfall, and the people sowed but the plants did not sprout, or, alternatively, if they sprouted a little, but their appearance changed back for the worse, as no rain fell after the first rainfall, they cry out about it immediately.

Rav Nahman said: This applies specifically if their appearance changed. However, if they dried out entirely, they do not cry out, as this condition cannot be improved. The Gemara asks: It is obvious that this is the case, because in the mishna we learned the word changed. The Gemara answers: No, it is necessary for Rav Nahman to issue his statement with regard to a case where they produced stalks after they dried out. Lest you say that producing stalks is a matter of significance, as it is a sign of strengthening, and the crops might be saved through prayer, Rav Nahman therefore teaches us that this is not the case.

The mishna further taught: And likewise, if rain ceased for a period of forty days between one rainfall and another, they cry out about this, because it is a plague of drought. The Gemara asks: What is the meaning of the phrase: A plague of drought? Isn't this simply a drought? Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: The mishna means that a period of forty days between one rainfall and the next is a plague that may cause a drought. In this regard, Rav Nahman said: When crops do not grow in one place due to lack of rain and must be imported by means of one river to another river,9

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**NOTES**

For the first rainfall – ביברסא אשתוק: Some commentators explain that the expression: The first rainfall, can be used in two different senses. It might refer to the first rain of the season, which itself can be divided into several separate rainfalls. However, it can also refer to the very first rainfall of the season (Ritva). The Gemara first understood the mishna as referring to the first rainfall according to the second sense, and therefore it raised the objection from another tannitic source, which states that the fasts do not begin until the time of the third rainfall. Rav Yehuda answered that the mishna is using the term according to the first sense. In other words, the mishna is saying that the fasts do not begin until all the rains of the first rainfall have failed to arrive on time.

No, it is necessary where they produced stalks – דרשוק: The early commentators concur that de’akkun refers to some sort of positive development in the growth of plants. However, they disagree over the precise meaning of the term. Some maintain that it is derived from the root ḥ-n, stalk, i.e., the plants produced stalks after (Rashi) or before (Ra’avad) they dried up.

Others derive the term from the root t-k-n, improve, explaining that the plants showed some sign of improvement after they had already dried up (Rabbeinu Gershom). Rabbeinu Hananel and others similarly suggest that after the plants had already dried up, they once again turned green. Rabbeinu Hananel, citing the gemara, further writes that after the plants had dried up, they became strong again.

Regardless of their precise interpretation of the phrase, most early commentators understand the Gemara as follows: The ruling of the mishna applies only if the crops have started to grow strangely, in which case they might recover. However, if the crops dried up completely, even if they subsequently produce stalks, improve, turn green, or become stronger, there is no point in crying out, as there is no longer any chance of saving them, and therefore any prayers offered for them would be in vain.

Rashi suggests another interpretation: The mishna’s ruling applies if the crops have started to grow strangely, in which case they must cry out so that the plants may recover. However, if the crops have dried up, even if they already produced stalks beforehand there is no need to cry out, as they will recover on their own.

River to river – לִידֵי חוֹר: Rashi explains that Rav Nahman distinguishes between drought, when it is possible to transport food from another region by river, and famine, when it is necessary to transport food by land. Rashi suggests a second interpretation, that a drought means that one river has dried up, although water can be diverted from a different river, whereas at a time of famine all the rivers in the region have dried up.
Rabbi Yohanan said: They taught this only with regard to a time when money is cheap and everyone has it, and produce is expensive. However, when money is expensive, i.e., unavailable, and produce is cheap, they cry out about it immediately, as this is considered a famine. As Rabbi Yohanan said: I remember when four se’ah of produce were sold for one sela, and yet there were many swollen by famine in Tiberias, as they did not have even one isar with which to purchase food.

Likewise, in the case of rain that benefits both this and that, trees and vegetation, but not cisterns, ditches, and caves, you can find this too, if both heavy and gentle rain fell, however, they did not fall in abundance, and therefore the water in the cisterns will not last through the summer. However, that which is taught in a baraita: If sufficient rain fell for cisterns, ditches, and caves, but not for either this or that, i.e., trees or plants, how can you find these circumstances? If the rain is enough to fill cisterns, how could it not be enough for plants and trees? The Gemara answers: Where rain comes in a single downpour, it will fill the cisterns but will provide no benefit to plants and trees.

The Sages taught: They cry out about trees that have not received enough rain, until near Passover, as beyond that time any rain will no longer benefit trees. However, they sound the alarm over cisterns, ditches and caves that have not been filled until before the festival of Sukkot. And at any time, if they have no water to drink, they sound the alarm over them immediately.

And what exactly is the meaning of their use of: Immediately, in these cases? Monday, Thursday, and Monday of the week in which the court became aware of the crisis, but not necessarily on the very day that it became evident. And in all of these cases of interrupted rainfall, they sound the alarm over them only in their district (iparkhya), but not in other areas where rain is falling normally.

From province to province, a famine – מ긴ה אברך: Some commentators explain that this means water has to be brought from one place to another (Rabbeinu Gershon). Others state that as long as produce can be transported by river, it is not called a famine. However, once it has to be carried overland by donkeys and the like, this creates a shortage that leads to famine (Meiri).

When money is cheap and produce is expensive – בмедицинות עבורי: Rabbi Hanina’s distinction between drought and famine parallels Rabbi Yohanan’s distinction between a case where money is cheap and produce is expensive and a case where money is expensive and produce is cheap (Ritva). In all these cases, the alarm is sounded immediately, as the mishna indicates that if the alarm is sounded for drought it must also be sounded for the more desperate situation of famine. Consequently, Rabbi Yohanan’s assertion that the Sages instituted their ordinance only when money is cheap and produce is expensive, but not vice versa, cannot mean that the alarm was not sounded when produce is expensive. Rather, he maintains that the Sages did not need to issue their regulation in that case, as the holokha when produce is expensive is obvious.

Near Passover – בקרוב לפסח: The precise meaning of the term in this context is unclear. The Gemara elsewhere (bekhorot 58a), explains that the expression: Near Passover, refers to the first of Nisan, the midpoint of the thirty-day period before Passover, during which the holokha pertaining to the Festival must be studied (see Mikhom and Meiri). Rashī states that the alarm is sounded during Passover itself. Others maintain that if Passover has arrived or it is near the Festival, and rain has not yet fallen in sufficient quantities for the trees, the alarm is sounded immediately (Rambam Sefer Zemanim, Hilkhot Taanit 2:17).

Before the festival of Sukkot – לפני סוכות: Many authorities understand the term Festival in this context in its usual sense, as a reference to the festival of Sukkot (Rambam Sefer Zemanim, Hilkhot Taanit 2:17). However, some commentators ask: How is it possible that the alarm was not sounded all summer long, when rainfall was most desperately needed, but only at the end of the year, near Sukkot (Ritva)? The Ritva explains that although the need for rain is greatest during the summer months, prayers for rain cannot be offered then, as one should not pray for a miracle. However, with the approach of Sukkot, prayers may be offered, as at that time the water shortage has already been felt for a long time and the rainy season is now at hand. Others add that the water shortage is really felt only near Sukkot, as all summer long there is still some water left in the storage cisterns from the previous winter (Ran). Alternatively, the term Festival means the festival of Shovavot, at the start of the summer (Ritva). Indeed, in the Jerusalem Talmud it is stated explicitly that the alarm is sounded for cisterns, ditches, and caves near the festival of Shavuot.

Downpour – שופך: Large amounts of heavy rainfall in a short period of time can lead to flooding, which can cause extensive damage to crops and can even wash away much of the topsoil. There are records of over 100 mm of rain falling in an hour and a half in Eretz Yisrael. Although this rainfall fills wells, it is harmful to all forms of vegetation.

District (iparkhya) – אברך: From the Greek ἐπαρχία, eparkha, a district.

About trees near Passover – לעץ מפרימי תפוש: If Passover is approaching and rain has not fallen in sufficient quantities in order for the trees to produce their fruits, fasts are proclaimed and special prayers recited until adequate rain falls or the rainy season has passed. Likewise, if Sukkot is approaching and the storage cisterns contain little water, fasts must be observed until there is adequate rainfall. If there is a shortage of drinking water, fasts are proclaimed at any time of the year, even during the summer months (Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayim 575:8).
The Sages taught in a baraita: They sound the alarm over trees during the other six years of the Sabbatical cycle, when the earth is tilled, but not during the Sabbatical Year, when one must refrain from working the land. However, for cisterns, ditches, and caves, they sound the alarm even in the Sabbatical Year. Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel says: Even for trees they sound the alarm in the Sabbatical Year, because they serve as sustenance for the poor. Since the poor rely on these trees for their food in the Sabbatical Year, they will lose their means of subsistence if it does not rain.

It is taught in another baraita: They sound the alarm over trees during the other years of the Sabbatical cycle, and for cisterns, ditches and caves they sound the alarm even in the Sabbatical Year. Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel says: Even for trees. Furthermore, they sound the alarm for aftergrowths of crops that have grown of their own accord in the Sabbatical Year, because they serve as sustenance for the poor, as it is permitted to eat aftergrowths.

With regard to a year whose rains fall in their proper time, to what may it be compared? To a servant whose master gave him his weekly portion on Sunday. It is thereby found that his dough is baked properly9 when it has the potential to cause death they sound the alarm over it, but when it does not have the potential to cause death they do not sound the alarm over it. And they sound the alarm over the arrival of locusts, for any amount, as it is likely that more locusts are on the way. However, they do not sound the alarm over the arrival of grasshoppers.

And with regard to a plague of diphtheria,10 when it has the potential to cause death they sound the alarm over it, but when it does not have the potential to cause death they do not sound the alarm over it. And they sound the alarm over the arrival of locusts, for any amount, as it is likely that more locusts are on the way. However, they do not sound the alarm over the arrival of grasshoppers. Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: They sound the alarm even over grasshoppers, as they too can cause a great deal of damage if they swarm in large numbers.
With regard to a year whose rains are abundant, to what may it be compared? To a servant whose master gave him his portion for a long period of time all at once. He performs all of his milling at one time, and it is therefore found that the mill grinds and produces waste from a kor of produce in the same amount as it grinds and produces waste from the much smaller kav of produce. During each milling process, the same amount of flour goes to waste. Consequently, milling a large amount of flour in a single milling process preserves flour. And similarly, it is found that dough is diminished from a kor, as it diminishes from a kav.

In contrast, with regard to a year whose rains are scarce, to what may it be compared? To a servant whose master gave him his portion little by little. It is thereby found that the amount that the mill would have ground from a kor of produce is that which in practice it grinds and produces from each kav. It is likewise found that the dough that would have been diminished from a kor is the same amount that is diminished from a kav. In sum, one retains less dough when given his sustenance little by little.

Alternatively, when its rains are abundant, to what may this year be compared? To a person who kneads clay. If he has a lot of water, his water is not used up and the clay will be well kneaded. If he has only a little water, the water will be used up and the clay will not be well kneaded.

The Sages taught: Once all the Jewish people ascended for the pilgrimage Festival to Jerusalem and there was not enough water for them to drink. Nakdimon, one of the wealthy citizens of Jerusalem, went to a certain gentle officer, and said to him: Lend me twelve wells of water for the pilgrims, and I will give back to you twelve wells of water. And if I do not give them to you, I will give you twelve talents of silver. And the officer set him a time limit for returning the water.

When the set time arrived and no rain had fallen, in the morning the official sent a message to Nakdimon: Send me either the water or the coins that you owe me. Nakdimon sent a message to him: I still have time, as the entire day is mine. At noontime the official again sent a message to him: Send me either the water or the coins that you owe me. Nakdimon sent a message to him: I still have time left in the day. In the afternoon he sent a message to him: Send me either the water or the coins that you owe me. Nakdimon sent a message to him: I still have time left in the day. That officer ridiculed him, saying: Throughout the entire year rain has not fallen,

The master entered the bathhouse in a state of joy, anticipating the large sum of money he was about to receive. As the master entered the bathhouse in his joy, Nakdimon entered the Temple in a state of sadness. He wrapped himself in his prayer shawl and stood in prayer.

Perek III
Daf 20 Amud a

Twelve wells – סבעים אמים. Some commentators write that Nakdimon asked specifically for twelve wells of water, in the hope that the merits of the twelve tribes would help him to repay the loan. If their merits proved insufficient, perhaps the twelve talents of silver would alone for their transgressions (Maharsha).

Notes

The mill grinds from a kor – קור. Whenever grain is milled, a certain amount is lost. Some of this loss occurs when the millstones themselves, which must be rough enough to grind the grain, fill with pieces of the ground grain. This wastage can be reduced by the proper adjustment of the space between the millstones, but some very fine flour invariably blows away. Since part of this loss is a constant amount, if only a small quantity of grain is ground, the percentage of the loss is higher, i.e., the loss will be higher in proportion to the total amount of grain milled.

Dough is diminished from a kor – קור. In the preparation of dough, some flour is always spilled or scattered, while a certain amount of dough will stick to the sides of the vessel. In this case too, the percentage of loss is greater when a small amount of flour is mixed.

BACKGROUND

The mill grinds from a kor – קור. Whenever grain is milled, a certain amount is lost. Some of this loss occurs when the millstones themselves, which must be rough enough to grind the grain, fill with pieces of the ground grain. This wastage can be reduced by the proper adjustment of the space between the millstones, but some very fine flour invariably blows away. Since part of this loss is a constant amount, if only a small quantity of grain is ground, the percentage of the loss is higher, i.e., the loss will be higher in proportion to the total amount of grain milled.

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LANGUAGE

Nakdimon – נאדקימון. Apparently from the Greek Νικόδημος, Nikodemos, which means the people’s victory.

Officer (hegemon) – הגםון. From the Greek Ἱγμῶν, hégon, which means a leader, especially a military leader. It came to refer specifically to Roman prefects. In the Talmud, the term means ruler or high official.

PERSONALITIES

Nakdimon ben Guryon – Näkkdimon ben Guryon. Nakdimon ben Guryon is described in several places in the sources as one of the wealthiest residents of Jerusalem at the time of the destruction of the Temple. He is possibly mentioned in the works of Josephus. As stated in the Gemara, his Hebrew name was apparently Buni, while he also had a Greek name, as was customary at the time. This Greek name was expounded on by the Sages as a way of memorializing this incident.

Notes

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